

Ali Schultz:

Welcome back, everybody. I'm here with Virginia Bowman, one of my favorite colleagues here at Reboot HQ. Welcome, Virginia. Today we get to talk about a subject near and dear to our hearts, especially your heart. And that is what you call the conditions of courage.

Virginia Bauman:

Hi. This is a theme that comes up in coaching a lot. And when I've brought it up to my colleagues, when I've shared it with other people, I often get this response of like, have you written this up? Have you talked about this? Because this would be a value to a lot of people. And I think that the conditions of courage, I'm kind of resistant to it because it's such a, it feels like too, to meaningless a phrase, right? Like the conditions of courage feels like something that would be in an airport book, for instance. But I think it's a really powerful concept to keep in mind, especially when you are a leader and you are building an executive team of leaders and you really need to think about, you know, or am I getting the flow of information that I need from these humans?

Ali Schultz:

Hmm. Wow. Can you cite an example? Or do you have an example?

Virginia Bauman:

Yeah, I think a lot of times when we are, when we're building our organizations, you know, we go through these thresholds where things become a little dysfunctional, right? Patterns are uncomfortable, relationships get strained, conflict happens more frequently. And in those moments, you need people around you that can tell you the truth from their perspective and you need to be able to assemble a bunch of different perspectives to understand the actual reality on the ground and lead people through that reality. And the only way that you're going to get a thorough perspective from another human is if they feel safe enough to deliver it to you. And those are the conditions of courage, right?

You could call this psychological safety. And I think that that is a big piece of this, but there's a part of it where, you know, psychological safety often is talked about in terms of what can the leaders do to foster this environment. The conditions of courage, I look at it a little bit differently. I look at it from the lens of an individual. What does the individual need to do in order to feel safe enough to say something that might upset the other leaders in the company? Because we each have that personal component of this work that plays into the organizational dynamic and pattern.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, and that is so important, that individual piece. Because it's related so much to our relational patterning, how we are in relationship, how we are with ourselves, so many things.

Virginia Bauman:

Yeah, this cuts deep really, really fast. It goes back to our childhood patterns. It goes back to our

familial patterns. And there's often a lot of dynamics that play into this for the leaders themselves.

One thing that I noticed when I started bringing up this theme before I became a coach was when I would talk to other founders and I would say, you know, I often encourage my best team members to interview. And I check on them every so often to make sure that they're interviewing. And the reason that I do this is because I want them to know A, what their worth is, B, what their options are at any given time, and C, that there is no risk to a theoretical loyalty that exists within this team that should prevent them from exploring all of their options.

And the response would often be, why the hell would I do that? That's terrifying. We're underpaying these people. It's a startup, right? Their fair market value is higher than I can afford. So aren't you worried that they're going to leave? And my response is often like, if I'm worried that they're going to leave, I want them to plan with me. I want them to give me a big heads up, right? But also I want to earn the fact that they are choosing to stay here. If I am the CEO of a company and I am falling down on that, then I'm going to lose value for the org, for the shareholders because they're going to leave. So...

Ali Schultz:  
Mm -hmm.

Virginia Bauman:  
I would often turn this into an inquiry in coaching, which is just like if you were a founder or a CEO and you found out that an individual or several top individuals were interviewing, how would you feel? Would you worry about it? Would you have a conversation? Would it challenge the relationship's trust? Or would it be, you know, a normal course of business and there's a lot of different responses that come up.

Ali Schultz:  
Oh, I imagine. I imagine.

Virginia Bauman:  
So, you know, oftentimes when I'm working with, when I'm working with individuals that are on an executive team and we're working on this agenda, you know, the thing that is hard to get across is that in order to have a solid plan A, you have to have a plan B. When there's tension in an org, when there's dysfunction in a team, you have to be ready to leave that team sometimes in order to stay.

Ali Schultz:  
Mm -hmm. Mm -hmm.

Virginia Bauman:  
And so the cultivation of a plan B or a condition that allows you to speak into dysfunction or

allows you to say something that upset someone, you know, people often don't go down that route of planning, like what their options are and actually building them out due to attachment issues, codependency, loyalty, fidelity. There are all these, all these things that get in the way of the emotional reality of like, I belong on this team and yet I'm going to take a large amount of effort and put it towards building options outside of this team.

And what happens often when we do this is it's months-long work, but the ability to have truthful conflict in an org goes up when those individuals have the safety, of course, to speak into that room to say, like, I may risk my belonging here to say what I see is the truth. And when you can say that, I feel like you, you embody those conditions of courage as a theme, as a leader. You're helping the other leaders know what your reality is, even if it's a risk to you.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah, I am thinking of a few big examples, ones from my own life in which this was very real. And one just in, I work with a lot of clients that are in transition, like they know their current role isn't working and they need to work through what that means if they were to leave or consider leaving and even entertaining that question is such a, it's such a big thing for them. And, you know, what we work through is can you see yourself on the other side of that? And what are the things that need to be in place in order for you to feel comfortable on that side?

Because once they have that plan B, it's so much easier to say, oh, I'm gonna be all right without this thing that I am like, falsely attached to or attached to, but it's not serving me in some ways or it's zapping my aliveness. And in a non-work situation, way back in the day of what feels like a past life for me now, but you know, when I, my first marriage was, I mean, we were young, we were in our twenties, so prefrontal lobes weren't totally formed. But I knew immediately like this, this could not work. And I was so, I felt so stuck and it wasn't until I was able to see myself outside of the relationship in, in almost the most mundane way of like, okay, I would get the dresser. I would have a bed. I would take the cat. He could have the dog. Like I would have this car. He would take the motorcycle, whatever it was. Right. I would be like, Oh, and I would be okay. I could find a rental. You know, like I have a job, like I can pay my bills.

So it's like, it's all of that. It's like regained ground as a, as a self, as an individual self to be like, Oh no, no, no. Like I have something to stand on here and I don't need to be tied to this thing for the reasons that I thought I needed to be tied to it for.

Virginia Bauman:

Yeah, when you did visualize those kinds of mundane things and you saw a picture that you could move towards, what did that do in the relationship?

Ali Schultz:

Well, it allowed me to show up differently, right? I could show up in ways where I didn't need to shrink as much. I could use my voice with less fear that someone was just gonna like explode or leave me. It's that whole fear of not belonging to something. And I was able to just start

operating in a new pattern or a new way of behaviors, how I was showing up in the relationship and that just shifted the dynamics. I was able to say, this is what I want. Like, if this doesn't change, like I want a divorce. This is where we're ending up. The D word.

Virginia Bauman:

Right? I mean, the way that I've seen this pattern play out a lot in work for clients is that before they do that work, the focus is on controlling the other party or the deficiency in the behavior of the other party.

And then when they do the work to create the conditions of courage, then they, it's less about the other deficiencies that they see. And it's more an invitation. It becomes this very beautiful, um, kind of call to the other, the other parties that are, um, creating the challenge to say like, this is actually me. And if you want me, this is what I need.

And it actually, I think, is so similar to what we think of as an ultimatum that often people feel like, you know, where is the line of controlling others versus, you know, showing up and saying, this is me and these are my terms. And I think that, you know, when you are, when you have the conditions of courage, it's actually paradoxically less controlling. When you are saying like, this is what I need to stay here, and you're actually saying what your real terms are, what your authentic needs are, that's less controlling than when you are silent and needing them to shift for you and focusing on where the deficiencies are, right?

So there's this really elegant, work that that kind of unfolds when you have those conditions of courage when you can say like you know we can talk about the divorce if that's the the place that we need to go but I honestly don't know what I do know is that these are my needs these are my boundaries and this is where I I need to be met in order to actually be here so I wanted to to kind of go into that so that people understand like the difference between kind of an ultimatum and an invitation in this context is often in the way that the information is presented and the fact that you have agency to leave, right? You have agency to actually separate and the other person doesn't have to change. The org doesn't have to change, but if they want you to stay, these might be the needs that they have to shift.

Ali Schultz:

Mm -hmm. Yeah, as you were talking, it really made me the 'words being an adult in relationship,' which I believe is the title of a book by David Rico, which I highly recommend, but it's one's ability to stand in in on their own ground with their first fidelity being themselves, right?

It's not like a codependent coping or a attachment fear running, whatever the kind of less direct relational patterns are that we emerge through our 25 years with or later, right? As humans and to really have an adult stance is to be able to hold our own ground and first of all, know what we want and need and then be able to voice it in a really clear and direct way.

And I always am amazed. I guess I don't know why I'm amazed, but in every organization, in

every team, especially if there's a storming and forming happening before there's any norming or trust or anything, everybody's individual and family and relational stuff is showing up in the room in regards to how much can I say here? What can I say here? Can I be my full self? Are they going to kick me out of the tribe? But then as an adult, right, it goes into am I going to lose my job? What am I going to do then? And it's almost like the fear stops us from knowing or thinking about the plan B.

Virginia Bauman:

Yes, absolutely. And I think that the real world is much messier than a coaching agenda sometimes is, right? And so as much as these are ideals, right? Like there was this, I think Maslow was musing in some of his writings on a definition of like whole love and how whole love is impossible if one partner needs the other, right? And you have to like not need one another in order to experience this kind of whole love.

And obviously these are ideals and the real world, the relational world inside our teams is much messier. It's impractical to expect every person on an executive team to be able to you know, walk away from a job at any point and feel safe, right? That's just not going to happen. So there are real questions that that brings up about like, how do we incrementally improve the safety or incrementally empower these humans to take care of their own work so that they're showing up to the team that it has the most leverage for collaboration and improving value in the company of any other team.

So, you can, you can approach this agenda, I think, from the perspective of the CEO, or even from the perspective of anyone who's leading a team, or you can approach it from an individual perspective where you're saying like, what do I need in order to feel safe saying what I need to say? Or what do I need in order to feel safe enough that I actually know what my needs are so that I'm not self-censoring when I'm asking for things or when I'm saying what's actually going on. So I, you know, I often think that when working with somebody who is experiencing relational challenges, my first question is what happens if you leave?

Ali Schultz:

Mm -hmm.

Virginia Bauman:

Let's explore that. Let's build that out so that you can stay.

Ali Schultz:

Yeah. I'm remembering so many conversations with clients in which we would start that conversation and we would get to that point, right? Where we're getting to what are the things you need to say? Like they'd be so clear and they'd be saying it to me and I'm like, yeah, that's really clear. I can feel it. And then I have to say to them, and remember your audience you know, because the person or people you're speaking to may not be conscious enough to be able to receive it even, right? Depending on whatever the dynamics are and whatever

organization you're in and really what they're up against in that real cultural sense of this is how we behave here, but also this is how we like think and see things here.

Virginia Bauman:  
Right.

Ali Schultz:  
But I think all that to say really, you can have the most beautifully articulated true thing to offer and to say and to speak your truth. And the person you may need to speak it to may not be able to receive it. And that's OK. It's just information. And you know, OK, this is my audience.

Virginia Bauman:  
Yeah.

Ali Schultz:  
But this is also what I'm up against and part of the dynamic at large that may be keeping me small or maybe keeping me in some form of tension or stress that I'm opting out of, choosing out of, wishing I wasn't around for.

It's, I see this a lot with people who are in narcissistic dynamics or borderline dynamics, and they just want to try to be understood, to be heard, to something. And obviously that party is unavailable for the message.

Virginia Bauman:  
Yeah. I certainly feel that the times that these conversations that I can remember them going really well, there was a sense of agency returned to the person who could make the changes, right? If it feels like their agency is being reduced, it might not land. If it feels like their agency is being returned, if you're saying what your truth is, what you need to stay, what you actually see is happening from your perspective, and then you are giving them agency to act from their perspective, then you have a really healthy conversation. Narcissistic patterns, you know, oftentimes don't mimic that.

Ali Schultz:  
Right.

Virginia Bauman:  
So we have to believe that a conversation is going to be able to be held with deep awareness and good faith for this to work. The magic of this condition, of course, is that it benefits you regardless of whether or not there's a healthy pattern or there's a challenging, unhealthy pattern happening. Your plan B is important regardless.

Ali Schultz:  
Yeah, there's so much power in being able to walk away and to know that you're whole as is.

You're fine as is. And whatever that was in that dynamic or with that person or whatever with that team, it was not of benefit to you in some way. Yeah.

Virginia Bauman:

So, you know, I think the other place that this shows up a lot is with the CEOs themselves because there are few places, few roles that become more controlling to a person's future than someone who feels that they are obligated to others.

And once you take on that CEO role, getting out of the CEO role is non-trivial. It's a big role you have a lot to do, but this agenda plays out with CEOs all the time. If you don't know what your plan B is, you also won't be showing up to the board knowing what you need. You won't be showing up to your executive team, knowing what you need in order to be most effective. And so paradoxically, you know, the CEO role also needs to be, it needs to be plan A, but we need to know what plan B is too, so that you don't hold onto it too tightly.

Ali Schultz:

Mm -hmm.

Virginia Bauman:

Because sometimes somebody else would make a better leader for the next chapter of an org. And the easiest way to recognize that is to know how you show up best and whether or not, and to match that with like, what does the company need?

But if you don't have a plan B, that conversation's not gonna be very honest with self.

Ali Schultz:

I know, or if you're really identified with the organization itself and it's going to be really hard to let go. And then your stuff gets muddled in the what the org needs type conversations. And then it gets really, really murky and hard for the rest of the organization, especially your leadership team.

Virginia Bauman:

Yep. So I guess the main thing that I wanted to get across with this agenda, with this episode, with this discussion is just to say like, we each have our own conditions of courage. They're very unique to us. Crafting them is kind of a day in, day out value centered practice. It's like, do I buy that house or do I buy this house?

Like that is a decision that plays into your conditions of courage. How leveraged are you as a leader, for instance? What is your lifestyle needs, right? All of those play into your conditions of courage. So this is kind of an expansive agenda, right? Some things are choices, some things are not choices. Sometimes we have to take care of family members. Sometimes it's something else, right? These are all very unique to our lives and there's no right or wrong, but we each have a huge role in knowing how we can create our own conditions of courage and then taking

the steps that we need to take so that they're intact and we feel safe to have very conflictual conversations with the leaders that we depend on to build value in the org.

Ali Schultz:

It's such a big and powerful shift when folks can show up that way. Thank you, Virginia. That was a great conversation.

Virginia Bauman:

You're welcome. Thanks for having me.